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ABSTRACT

Passage of the Education Amendments of 1974 added a new section to Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which required the U.S. Commissioner of Education to undertake specific activities regarding evaluation of the program. Efforts made by the Office of Education to implement this law are described, including the development of standard evaluation models, the discussion of those models with State and local ESEA administrators, the establishment of a technical assistance program, and the formulation of plans for addressing evaluation problems in non-typical Title I settings. (Author/MV)

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USOE's Title I Evaluation Technical Assistance Efforts
Background and the Evaluation System*

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Abstract

The passage of the Education Amendments of 1974 added a new section to Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which required the U.S. Commissioner of Education to undertake specific activities regarding evaluation of the program. The work of the Office of Education to implement this law is described including the development of standard evaluation models, the discussion of those models with State and local ESEA administrators, the establishment of a technical assistance program, and the formulation of plans for addressing evaluation problems in non-typical Title I settings.

"The Committee repeats its view that the Office of Education has not assumed the leadership it should have concerning evaluation activities under Title I. ...The Committee urges OE to correct this failing." (Subcommittee on Education, 1974). Such were the feelings of the Committee on Education and Labor of the House of Representatives in hearings that preceded passage of the Education Amendments of 1974. Those feelings are also reflected in an amendment by that legislation to Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. In that amendment, a Section 151 was added to Title I and has influenced greatly the evaluation efforts of the Office of Planning, Budgeting, and Evaluation (OPBE) of the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) for the past two years. The purpose of this paper is to describe those developmental efforts and some of their products.

Background

Title I of ESEA states that the policy of the United States will be "to provide financial assistance ... to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means ... which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children" (ESEA, Title I, Section 101, "Declaration of Policy"). In the years since its enactment, the annual appropriations have grown from $959 million to over $2 billion, and the funds have been used in increasing proportions to provide remedial services in the basic skills (reading and math, primarily) to low-achieving students (Wargo, Tallmadge, Michaels, Lipe, and Morris, 1972; Trismen, Waller, and Wilder, 1976; NIE, 1976).

Evaluation of the impacts of Title I services is required at all three programmatic levels: local, State, and federal. As stated in Section 141(a)(6) of Title I, a local educational agency must assure its State "That effective

procedures, including provisions for appropriate objective measurements of educational achievement, will be adopted for evaluating at least annually the effectiveness of the programs in meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children." Similarly, a State must assure the U.S. Commissioner of Education "that the State educational agency will make ... periodic reports (including the results of objective measurements required by Section 141(a)(6) ...) evaluating the effectiveness of payments under this title and of particular programs assisted under it in improving the educational attainment of educationally deprived children ..." (ESEA, Title I, Section 142(a)(3)). The Commissioner of Education is required by the General Education Provisions Act (Section 417(a)(1)) to report to Congress annually on the effectiveness of all educational programs in achieving their legislated goals.

Attempts at the federal level to use data from the State annual evaluation reports to satisfy this last reporting requirement have been frustrated by the lack of comparability --- and often of validity --- of the data in them. Both USOE and the Committee cited above recognized these problems, and in August of 1974, Congress amended Title I with the addition of Section 151 as mentioned earlier. It lists specific activities required of the Commissioner. The subsections of Section 151 can be summarized as follows:

"The Commissioner shall

(a) provide for independent evaluations which describe and measure the impact of programs and projects assisted under this title ...

(b) develop and publish standards for evaluation of program or project effectiveness ...

(c) where appropriate, consult with State agencies in order to provide for jointly sponsored objective evaluation studies ...

(d) provide to State educational agencies, models for evaluations

of all programs conducted under this title ... which shall include uniform procedures and criteria to be utilized by local educational agencies, as well as by the State agency.

(e) provide such technical and other assistance as may be necessary to State educational agencies to enable them to assist local educational agencies in the development and application of a systematic evaluation of programs in accordance with the models developed by the Commissioner.

(f) develop a system for the gathering and dissemination of results of evaluations and for the identification of exemplary programs.

Subsection (f) of Section 151 describes the models further as specifying "objective criteria" and outlining techniques and methodology" for producing data which are comparable on a statewide and nationwide basis." Subsection (g) requires a periodic report on the activities of this Section.

Overview of USOE's Implementation of Section 151

As you can see, those requirements outline a comprehensive, complete evaluation program: conduct evaluations, upgrade evaluation activities at other administrative levels so that reported data are comparable, use those data to ---among other things---identify especially effective instructional practices, and disseminate information about those practices. The evaluation program outlined is complete in that the steps in the legislation require that the feedback loop be closed: that is, they specify that the information from evaluation findings must be disseminated and then presumably used to refine program operations.

Another observation about the legislation is that complementary activities are required. The Section 151 evaluation program requires and is strengthened by its reliance on two mutually dependent but different strategies. One is the use of data compiled and reported upward from the local and State agencies to

USOE. Those data will provide an information base which has the qualities of recency (because the data are reported annually) and of breadth (because most if not all of the Title I projects in the nation will be reporting).

The second strategy stated in the Section is the use of Federal studies to measure the impact of the program nationally. The information base generated through this strategy has the qualities of efficiency (data are collected only on a sample of sites nationwide) and of depth (more data can be collected in each of those sites, beyond that possible through self-reports). Each strategy also has its weaknesses: quality control in the reporting system, and infrequency with the national studies. Together, however, the two strategies can adequately and efficiently provide answers to most administrators' questions.

A third observation about the legislation is that it presents a real challenge to federal, State, and local Title I administrators and evaluators. It calls for a mutual effort to document their programs' operations and impacts and highlights specific approaches for facilitating such an accomplishment. Those approaches are consultation among the parties at all administrative levels, the use of models as a structure for generating comparable data, and the provision of technical and other assistance in support of that structure.

USOE personnel would like to see this mutual effort be one eventually which reaches across all Title I program areas and sites. It will represent a joint commitment by all Title I educators (those in regular schools, in migrant education, in State institutional programs---wherever children are receiving Title I services) and emphasizing basic skills alone or in conjunction with other goal areas such as attitudinal improvement, health, or attendance. The challenge for all of them will be to provide policy-makers at all levels with the information necessary to make important decisions about the program. That day may be quite a few years off, but initial reactions to USOE's work thus far suggest that such an objective is not totally unrealistic.

OPBE's plans call for the development and adoption of evaluation models for the variety of Title I settings in phases. Current implementation efforts are focusing on projects in the basic skills in regular school settings. (Estimates indicate that basic skills programs serve most of the children in Title I.) Developmental work is still underway to address impacts of projects involving institutionalized youth, the children of migrant workers, and pre-school youngsters. We are addressing also the problems of assessing projects' non-instructional services and their activities to improve students' affective development. Results from work in those areas will not be available for some time.

OPBE personnel are also pursuing a program of technical assistance to States to facilitate their work with their school districts to standardize evaluation practices. The program has three components: workshops for State administrators and evaluators, publications, and free consulting services from USOE staff and from Technical Assistance Centers established for this purpose. The Centers provide the most active, direct form of specific assistance and are described in the presentation which follows this one.

The first set of workshops were given the fall of 1976 for three days each in ten locations. The curriculum included detailed presentation of each model, general discussions of typical test and measurement issues, sessions on the interpretation of findings, and work periods for doing examples. Each participant was given sets of materials and videotapes to help him give the workshops to school district personnel in his State.

The publications series consists of practical handbooks in various areas of evaluation. Two are available from the Government Printing Office: A Practical Guide to Measuring Project Impact on Student Achievement (document 017-080-01460)

and A Procedural Guide for Validating Achievement Gains (document 017-080-01516). They establish a series of decisions to be made in planning and conducting an evaluation or in validating the results of evaluations, respectively. Available almost a year, the first of the series has sold over 8000 copies; the second has sold 3000 in four months.

Others in the series will address the problems of assessing children's affective development, of examining achievement tests for bias, of managing a large-scale testing program, of using criterion-referenced tests, and of estimating standard project costs. They will become available throughout the next year.

USOE's Title I Evaluation and Reporting System

The work to develop some standard models for the local and State evaluation of Title I was begun in June, 1974 after the need for it had been clarified by earlier work (Wargo, et al., 1972). A contract was awarded through federal competitive procedures to RMC Research Corporation of Mountain View, California. That work involved:

(1) interviews with policy-makers in both the Executive Branch and Congress to determine their information needs;

(2) a review of four years' worth of State Annual Evaluation Reports (for FY 71, 72, 73, 74);

(3) a tabulation, as possible, of data about the Title I program;

(4) a determination of the common reporting practices which might be adopted nationwide to serve policy-makers' needs;

(5) the recommendation of some such practices; and

(6) a check on the feasibility of the suggestions with administrators and evaluators in a small sample of states (Gamel, Tallmadge, Wood, and Binkley, 1975).

In June, 1975, this developmental effort was completed, and another award was made to RMC Research through competitive procedures. That project involved visits to all States and territories as well as to three local school districts in each to discuss the prototype system and its implications in those settings (Bessey, Rosen, Chiang, and Tallmadge, 1976).

Throughout both projects two advisory groups have been relied upon for recommendations and feedback. One panel, the Policy Advisory Group, consisted of State Title I program administrators, State evaluators, local program administrators, local evaluators, parents, and representatives from both the National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The second panel, the Research Advisory Group, included nationally recognized experts in the areas of evaluation and assessment methodology, measurement, and criterion-referenced tests. Both panels have reacted to plans, suggested changes, and provided advice through all phases of the work. Such input has also been solicited from State and local administrators during the site visits.

The main features of the currently proposed evaluation system are shown on Table I. As you see, the system distributes responsibilities across all program levels and allows flexibility in choice of comparison group and type of test instrument used.

The Models

Those choices are structured by the system to fall among three evaluation models which can incorporate data from achievement tests with or without national norms. Each model compares the growth of the Title I project children to that of a different group of children: (a) in one case, that comparison group is the children in a test publisher's norming sample who scored the same on the pretest as the project participants (hence, the model is called "Norm-referenced); (b) a

Table 1 Summary of the Main Features of the Title I Evaluation System

Features of model designed for regular district programs stressing
- basic skills information reported on test scores, cost, numbers of participants, hours per week of instruction, parent activities, and teacher training
- LEAs/SEAs have choice of three evaluation models
- LEAs/SEAs have choice of basic skill tests (including criterion-referenced)
- test scores are converted to a common scale so that results can be compared and aggregated
- detailed but relatively simple procedures and formats are prescribed for LEAs/SEAs to use in reporting results

Timing

- proposed rules in fall, 1977
- technical training of SEAs in fall of 1976 and continuing
- final regulations in early spring of 1978
- LEAs first implement models in school year 1979-80.
- first use of data in SEA reports to OE in winter, 1931

Responsibilities

LEAs
- choose evaluation model and test instrument
- purchase tests and arrange for testing and other data collection
- insure that correct data gathering procedures are followed:
  e.g., tests are administered at correct time and under correct and uniform conditions; all appropriate children are tested
- score tests or have them scored
- report results to SEA in appropriate format

SEAs
- provide technical assistance to LEAs directly or through Technical Assistance Centers
- verify accuracy of LEA reports
- aggregate data and report results to OE

OE
- develop and modify models as necessary
- issue regulations
- publish technical assistance materials
- provide technical assistance to SEAs, directly or through Technical Assistance Centers
- verify accuracy of SEA reports
- aggregate data and report results to Congress

second alternative is the use of a local comparison group of children who are like Title I participants but who receive no compensatory services (the "Control---or Comparison---Group" model); (c) a third possibility is the use of a local group of children who are not like the Title I participants in that they all scored higher on a "pretest" (the "Regression Approach"). There will also be provisions for the approval of the use of alternative models and variations as long as each satisfies general technical standards of the system and generate comparable data.

Hence, all models used will have at least two things in common: the necessity of (1) pretest and posttest information about Title I participants and (2) that same information about a comparison group for estimating a "baseline" for the Title I children's growth without a project. That second necessity is the one which will impose the most constraints on evaluation practices. For example, if a project chooses to use Model A, the norm-referenced approach, it will be relying on a publisher's norm group for the "baseline" and will need the same pretest - posttest information on project participants as the test has for its norming sample. That is, if test scores are available for October and May for the norming sample, that is when they must be collected from the project children. Hence, a major implementation consideration with Model A is adherence to a schedule in which pre-and posttests correspond to the norm dates of the test.

Reliance on a local group of children similar to those in the Title I project for answering the second question above removes the test schedule constraint but necessitates others regarding the similarity of the two groups of children and the withholding of compensatory services from the comparison group of supposedly equally needy children. The use of random assignment to project and "control" conditions is not possible since it is the intent of the

program to serve the neediest children. Hence, data from a "comparison" group of similar, but not equivalent, children are used and statistical adjustments eliminate as much as possible alternative hypotheses that rival exposure to Title I to explain the project group's differential improvement.

Reliance on a local group of children completely dissimilar from the project participants avoids the timing and withholding-of-services constraints but introduces considerations regarding the statistical assumptions of regression analysis. For example, because a regression line to predict posttest scores based on a distribution of pretest ones is used to estimate the project children's performance without a project, that line must be based on a sufficient number of children to be adequately stable and accurate.

Despite the various constraints necessary to make each model valid, the provision of three alternative approaches -- each accommodating various types of test scores -- will make the system usable in most situations. As exceptions arise, however, States can propose an alternative which will then be judged as to its methodological validity and its ability to generate data comparable to that of the regular evaluation system. If it is found to be adequate in both regards, it can then be used instead of one of the three described above.

Reporting Comparable Data

The system is built upon evaluations of project effects at the local level and concentrates on the validity of those estimates. Evaluators are advised to choose the most sensitive test instrument to measure progress in achieving project goals; they are also advised to select the most appropriate basis of comparison for their Title I children such that the estimates of their growth without the project will be as accurate as possible. Since each model, if implemented correctly, will yield an unbiased estimate of a project's effects, aggregating results across models is possible.

The system, then, allows the aggregation of unbiased, project-valid estimates of the effects of Title I services. Those estimates are expressed in one common metric to make such aggregation possible. That scale is one of transformed standard scores having a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 21.06. These parameters were derived to make this scale of "Normal Curve Equivalents" (NCE's) match the percentile distribution at 1,50, and 99. Figure 1 on the following page shows the relationship between standard deviation units (z scores), stanines, percentiles, and NCE's.

In short, the evaluation system is one of three basic models --- and others as approved --- which can incorporate different types of test scores. It is one which is implemented at the local project level and uses the project as the unit of analysis throughout: that is, project descriptors such as enrollment, cost, hours of exposure and an estimate of average gain are computed and reported to higher administrative levels (local school districts, intermediate districts, State offices, etc. as appropriate in particular settings).

A system of forms and instructions for implementing each model has also been developed. Some States have indicated that they will adopt the forms for collecting the necessary information from their school districts; others will simply modify their current forms, especially in those cases where a consolidated form is used for locals to report on all State or federal programs. States are encouraged to augment the required information with other data necessary for their own administrative activities.

Advantages of the system at the Federal level stem partly from its provision of data necessary for USOE to fulfill its reporting requirements to Congress. Also, the availability of comparable, project-level data at both the State and Federal levels will allow the identification of especially effective educational practices. At the State level, it can also facilitate more efficient monitoring and guidance of local Title I efforts. Advantages of the system to local

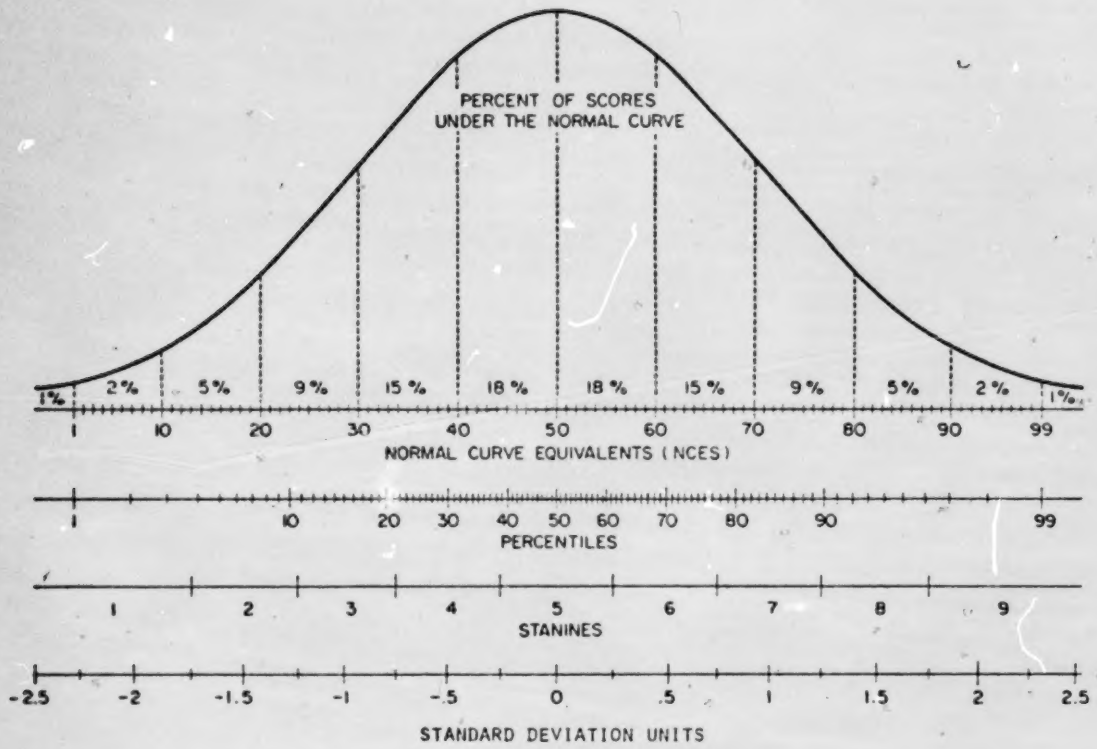

Figure 1. Area under the normal curve divided into NCEs, percentiles, stanines, and standard deviation units.

taken from Tallmadge and Wood
(October, 1976-draft, p. 9)

educators stem from its potential both for improving their evaluation activities and for providing them access to an increasingly useful data base: that on enrollments, services, staffing, and outcomes from Title I projects nationwide. Hence, our hopes for the system are that decision-makers at all levels will find benefits from its use.

Summary

This paper has described a little of the history and development of a Title I evaluation and reporting system to be used nationwide as one of the strategies for assessing the impact of ESEA, Title I. This strategy will operate concurrently with another involving more infrequent, indepth national evaluations of the program and is meant to improve the data base available to local and State administrators as well as that for use at the Federal level.

While no claims are made regarding perfection in the proposed system (and obvious compromises in rigor have been necessary to make it useable by most people), USOE personnel do feel that in most cases it will guide judgments of administrators and evaluators in ways likely to provide them with useful information. The system has been subjected to considerable examination and debate and has benefitted from that scrutiny. Those involved assume and hope that such a dialogue will continue, and we welcome constructive comment.

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